

Eckington Historic Designation

2nd Town Hall

March 16, 2016

Randy, Eckington Civic Association (ECA) President welcomes everyone to the meeting.

- Thank you to United Scene for loaning chairs.
- Upcoming workshops:
 - Oral Histories – “Tell it like it is or was” - April 2nd 1-3 at Summit
 - Windows workshop: April 9th – St. Martin’s Catholic Church – on North Capitol & T st NW in Pioneer Room, 1-3PM, hosted by the DC preservation league: how to maintain old windows and make windows energy efficient. Open to Eckington & Bloomingdale communities.
- 3rd historic preservation town hall: on May 9th, 7-9pm format TBD; tentatively at Summit.
- Randy explains that we are exploring applying for historic designation status for Eckington neighborhood, sponsored by the Eckington Civic Association. We are working w/ QED for historic info.

Hannah, ECA recording secretary, explains survey process

- In early May, we will make a survey available electronically and in hard copy that can be mailed in. We will gather responses through late May.
- The ECA board will review the survey results and present them to the Eckington Civic Association.
- The ECA will vote on whether or not to apply for historic designation status at the June 6th meeting.

Charlene introduces panelists.

Kim Elliot, DC Historic Preservation Office

- In an unrelated note, the Historic Preservation Office is gathering outreach for 2020 Historic Preservation Plan – every state must produce one. Asks for feedback from everyone.
- Kim is eager to answer questions about review & permit process.
- Shows map of parts of DC that are protected parts of historic districts – includes landmarks, many neighborhoods.
- Historic preservation goals: Identify historic resources; Protect landmarks & districts, review alterations and construction; Promote reuse, rehabilitation, adaptation
- Benefits of historic designation:
 - Allows for community involvement in managing change

- Maintains community character
- Helps ensure compatibility
- Minimizes loss of historic materials and history
- Promotes rehabilitation & restoration
- Provides incentives
- **Things that do need review:** additions, brick pointing, fence repair, roof replacement, window/door replacement, installing solar panels, interior demolition (note – always need a permit to replace windows in DC)
- **Do not need historic review permit:** painting, “ordinary repairs,” storm windows, window screens, tile, carpeting floor covers, cabinets, countertops, trim work, movable fixtures, plantings
- How to get a permit:
 - Historic Preservation Center at permit office, stop by desk to get permit signed off if something simple. If requires more review, work with applicant and offer suggestions, then bring specs to permit center.
 - If larger project, may require going to Historic Preservation Review Board (9 members including architects, review cases every month), help guide design direction, staff writes report on project, HRP votes on project. If approved, project moves forward. May make recommendations before approving.
- Homeowner grant program
 - Cash grant up to \$25k (\$35k in Anacostia) for restoration of homes, only for exterior restoration work, for original materials. Also for reconstruction of missing features.
 - Grants available in list of districts (not all included); give out about 15 grants per year. List was determined by City Council; for list to change, would need council to amend list to add another historic district. Currently Eckington is not on that list.

Stephen Cochran, Development Review Division, DC Office of Planning

- If you want control over neighborhood design, best option is historic designation. The alternative is zoning. Zoning cannot control as much, but can do some.
 - Most projects are “by right”- 70-80% do not go through zoning. If your project meets all zoning regulations, you can do something by right.
 - Eckington: 2 types of zones: Commercial/industrial by Florida Ave (moderate/medium density); everywhere else – R4 row house (low/moderate density).
 - NOTE: Stephen explains later that most of the row house zoning cannot be converted to high-density units – many of the lots can contain no more than two units per lot.
 - If construction is not “by right,” it goes through zoning. Variance relief or special exception (latter is meeting certain criteria), planned unit developments (e.g., Trilogy project, JBG’s Eckington Yards/Flower Market project).
- New zoning regs in September

- Will be possible for neighborhoods to tailor existing zones. Example – if lot is usually 1800 sq', say that by right townhouse can be 1600 sq' or 2000 sq'. Can determine how big side yard should be, how much of lot house can cover, what type of accessory buildings allowed (e.g., garage or rental unit); set-backs (from street or upper levels); how far is building from sidewalk.
- Cannot do architectural/aesthetic aspects (e.g., home renovations must maintain Wardman style).

Greta Fuller, Homeowner in the Anacostia Historic District, former ANC commissioner, part of historic preservation group in Anacostia

- Ensure that homeowners know about Historic Designation Society, understand important issues.
 - Neighbors need to understand historic designation.
 - People afraid to be in historic districts b/c of restrictions. Now not the case. For changing windows, you have to get a permit whether you're in historic district or not. For any big change (E.g., plumbing, electric), should go through permit anyway.
 - Only issue – have to go through historic preservation first. Really just interested in curb appeal, don't care about interior of home unless it's a landmark.
- If not for historic designation in Anacostia, we would continue to lose character and history of neighborhood. Anacostia now looks nothing like it used to. Anacostia is pro-development, but wants development to be in keeping with character of neighborhood.
- Greta shares example of home that was preserved from destruction through historic designation status. Developers kept façade of house, but could still build house without large burden. Could use original or compatible materials, was able to renovate with little burden. With new houses being built, need to make sure that it fits with the rest of the houses on the street. We don't want any developer to feel burdened. Just want new property to fit in community.
- Discusses former historic Anacostia group and the work they've done to protect the neighborhood.
- People like historic neighborhoods – want to see how people live. Tourism is very lucrative for DC – if having a historic district will help preserve that...
- Don't be afraid of permit process. The people involved are very good to work with.
- Historic Anacostia went a little further – worked w/ Tim Denae at HPO, came up with own pattern book that talks about doors, windows, floor plans. Any homeowner in neighborhood can refer to document.
 - Kim notes that the “pattern book” is a great idea and goes beyond what's on historic preservation website.
- Shares example – 1 street over from historic district, building apartment building by right, creating 5-6 story apartments next to 2-story Queen Anne's homes. Now people want to expand historic district so they have a voice.
- Stephen adds: Being historic district doesn't mean that everything is “frozen” – for example, 14th st is a historic district.

Peter Sefton & Marjorie Leighton (?), Historian with QED Associates

- Want to share what they've learned about Eckington. Would welcome hearing what others know.
- Story about what makes Eckington a historic community. "The House that Jill Built After Jack's had proved a failure" by C. E. Gardener about Truesdale and his wife.
 - Jill married man who built house, but only married him on condition that he would build house she wants after they were married. Book explains house she was going to build and failure of his house. He put a beautiful modern sink in kitchen, but didn't put drain boards on either side. Big shelves so high and deep that she couldn't reach them. Writes about house built in 1890s – when suburbs were born.
 - Suburban houses represent the way people envisioned life. Front of house like fort on st, then go into entry foyer with staircase. Kitchen in back of house because kitchen is private – it's where the servants are (1890s) or where you do cooking (1950s). Front of house – parlor & dining room (public space, vs private space). That's houses in Eckington are built. Renovations now – 20th century. Kitchen sometimes in center so whole house revolves around it.
 - Jill's house – first suburb beyond boundary line, has trolley so men could go to work while women took care of home.
 - Notion of suburbs born with industrial revolution, into 20th century. Suburb being re-invented as re-urbanization – suburb of Eckington is part of city of Washington, but it wasn't to begin with.
 - Book about changes in marriage, women's status and engagement in community life.
 - House as economic unit, woman as mistress. Jill interested in form following function.
 - Eckington is very interesting to study because of how sexual segregation occurred here.
- Gardner model homes- no photographs, but have drawings of homes. Arts & Crafts-style homes. Gardner's books are written in form of letters between architect & client (and client is usually write). Interesting dialog, thrash out details of how to build house, why to use one approach rather than another.
 - Unfortunately, 2 homes built east of railroad, were torn down in less than 20 years. Others made it to 1920s. One lasted much longer, torn down in 2010. Was a sad loss.
 - Gardner's design philosophy: If you try to make something too ornate, it doesn't work. Roofs leak, too hard to take care of, etc. He prefers cleaner design, simple principles – some ornamentation, but not too much. Also wanted to integrate home with nature – able to look out, but not have neighbors look in.
 - Seems like he was establishing principles for homes of Eckington – not fussy or overdone, but still beautiful. Practical and honest, but look good – not too utilitarian.
 - Steep roof to let rain run off; porches very important – serves as outdoor room, social space, especially when no A/C. Especially back porch is important. Front porches are not on every house in Eckington, but more common than not. Depends somewhat on when it was built.

Questions & Answers

How do ANC's and the Historic Preservation Office determine which changes are acceptable?

- When you come in or call office with a project, we see if it needs to go to HPRB. For example, if adding more than 500 sq', need to go to Historic Preservation Review Board, ANC meeting. Other examples, new construction or controversial project w/ opposition – usually larger-scale projects.
- Greta: ANC usually votes yes/no, but historic group digs into materials, look and feel of development, size, etc. ANC may not want to do the work that the historic group does.

How much massing change is too much to a building in a historic district?

- Depends on site context – depends on other buildings around it. If 2-story homes on st but by right you could go to 50-60 feet, that would be something that HR would consider.

Eckington is seeing a lot of quick flips by shoddy developers. Does historic dev help deter predatory developers & shoddy renovations?

- Yes – HPRB ensures quality architecture & quality work, especially with regard to materials match and details (on the exterior of the home). Does not look at “use” – so if single-family home is flipped into 4 condos within same “envelope,” do not have any say in changing that from single-family to multi-unit home. But can make sure that any additions fit into context of neighborhood and aren't out of scale/out of context. Also look at details like, where do all the new gas meters go – how it looks architecturally.
- Zoning does have a say. Most of Eckington's zoning would prevent row house from being converted to apartment. Most lots can be at most 2 units. If lot is 1800 sq', can do 2 units at most – if you want to convert to 3 units, would have to have 2700 sq' for lot. (900 sq' per unit). Goal is to keep single-family and duplex-homes that way, not apartment buildings.
- Greta – historic group can bring attention to issues, speak to offices, if developers have to get variance, historic group can testify on your behalf. We're not the last people you talk to, but we can get you started.

Neighborhood is seeing exploding growth to south and north. We love Eckington's charm and feel, and are concerned about this growth. Would Historic Designation help manage density and preserve single family home?

- Kim: Yes. To raze a building, would have to go through HPRB. If the building is significant and a contributing resource to community (built in certain time period), could not raze building.
- Stephen: Shows map of Eckington – for the most part, anything that is row house cannot be converted into apartment building. Even if a developer assembled several lots, would still be limited in number of units and height. Row house area should be relatively space unless vacant lot or someone assembles several. Small pockets up by Rhode Island Avenue and railroad that have more density. But area is conservation area, so city

doesn't want to see change. Lower area – “change area”- industrial or commercial, higher density residential/commercial.

- Greta: Even if houses are still there, people could make changes – e.g., get rid of porches, change all the windows – can change the face of the whole block.
 - Stephen: Zoning doesn't address that. But still need permission for height, cannot change gables on roofs – zoning is moving in that direction.
 - Greta – if you're not a historic district, you can't control those changes.
 - Peter – many pop-ups all over. Stephen – that's why zoning changed.
- Marjorie describes her neighborhood – independent freeholds, watching developers buy up rows of them, PUDs will come before ANC to level and rebuild larger buildings. Only protection would be if they become historic district. Hard situation – developers are paying top-dollar for homes that weren't worth so much for homes bought years ago.

Can developer remove turrets or front porches in HD?

- No – considered important historic features.

If Eckington becomes historic district, would that help address big ugly pop-ups?

- Yes, it would. You can see examples of pop-ups that aren't in historic district (e.g., 11th & V st – 5 story home in row of 2-story homes). If not visible and under the 35' limit, can do pop-up. If visible from street, cannot do pop-up.

How are things grandfathered in treated? If someone has pop-up and wants to do change to it, what happens?

- For houses that have made changes (e.g., pop-up, vinyl windows), nothing that makes you go back and bring into compliance.
- Q- What if you do want to do change or repair?
 - Would review changes to make compatible. If you put in vinyl windows and want to change them, you'd have to put in compatible windows.
- Greta – on her street, have beautiful Victorian house, put deck & 2nd floor on side of house – can see it, and was put up with no permit. When they had to repair it, “we got ‘em” – it looks atrocious, and we can correct. If it's not permitted and it doesn't look right.
 - Note: This work should have had a permit regardless; that had nothing to do with being in a historic district.
 - Kim: sounds like they will have to get permit, but since it's visible, would likely not be approved.

Are there specific issues for commercial/retail/restaurant uses in historic district?

- Stephen: Lots of ways you can address how a commercial street is used. Tailored zone like along 14th st with preferences/bonuses for certain kinds of uses, restrict other uses (e.g., limit on % of bars and restaurants). On H st, neighborhood didn't want preservation area, so they had own set of guidelines that were adopted into zoning code

with preferences w/out historic designation for restoration of pre-1959 building on commercial street. Divided into sub-areas for incentives for different uses. Zoning can also address shop-fronts – have to have clear glass for 75% of portion of building, cannot have grillwork that obscures too much of shopfront, - can tailor dimensional aspects of zone. What we cannot tailor but historic preservation can are style of building, materials. If you want to keep the way your neighborhood looks now, historic preservation does that.

- Kim: One thing we review is signage. Guidelines are part of DCRA guidelines on signage – many aren't specific to historic preservation; can be tailored to district (e.g., Chinatown different from Eckington). Don't allow blinking or rotating neon signs.

What is the process for determining what is contributing or non-contributing building?

- Through a lot of research (e.g., work by QED), time period is determined that is “major time period of development,” so things built within that time period are “contributing” structures.
- Peter – integrity factors in too. If things have changed a lot, may no longer be contributing. Would be case-by-case decision on how intact building is (e.g., does pop-up negate everything else in building?)
- Greta – example in Brookland round house – not historic because they'd added too much. Note: Greta's remark probably meant the building listed was not eligible as a historic landmark, it might still be contributing in a historic district.

What is process for creating Eckington zoning district that would be tailored version of R4? Are these stand-alone or layered w/ historic district?

- Would be own zones – would be too cumbersome to have overlay of both tailored zoning and historic designation. Want one-stop shop for all requirements. No more new overlays; old overlays are new ones with all requirements combined.
- Making new zoning district would be a lot of work – needed to do a lot of research, quality-decisions. Lots of quantitative data and quality choices. Almost always initiated by neighborhood, not zoning board. Also hope we don't initiate one in next year- first need to teach people how new zoning code works.

What impact would historic district have on affordability, especially for renters and people who don't live here but may want to move in?

- Greta – don't think historic district itself causes property value to increase as much as AMI in DC causes value to increase. More about cost of housing that developers are driving up. Historic districts do sell. If you have a pristine house built in 1860, it will be more expensive. If someone wants it, they will spend money to get it. But cost of housing is economics, not historic district.
- Follow-up: For Trilogy revisions, and similar – doesn't historic district add cost to development? Doesn't review process add cost?
 - Review process already built in. Adding historic process is minor. They have enormous up-front cost, discussion w/ ANC/Office of planning to get to zoning,

- Some things like vinyl vs wood windows – it all has cost.
 - Greta – yes, all has cost. Wood siding more expensive than vinyl siding. But when you sell house, you’re going to get back more. People who live in historic district like look and feel of what old Washington looked like.
- Stephen – Adams Morgan – best looking building on 18th st is also historic building. Entirely affordable, but very well done.
- Peter – not a dichotomy (wood or nothing) – some more affordable options. Also, if you’ve invested in making house nice, want to protect investment – don’t want person next door to do something hideous – protects what’s right around you.

Surveys – when?

- Month of May; ECA board will review them and vote at June 6 ECA meeting.

Opportunity for citizens to share views in oral (vs survey) format?

- Next town hall – considering format, could be opportunity to talk and share opinions.

Will the survey examine non-response bias – affected population?

- Survey includes address. We also ask that the community helps the survey reach as many people as possible.

How does living in historic district affect property taxes?

- Greta – no historic tax on property taxes (as far as she knows) – has to do with what DC deems property to be worth.
- Kim- Easements – several historic conservation easement companies that gives tax relief, but it’s another review process. Example – L’Enfant Trust.

Examples of profitable businesses that incorporated into historic district

- 14th st is historic district, has been for several years before big rebirth.
- Greta – H st/Barracks Row/Eastern Market.

If neighborhood doesn’t become historic district but wants to designate specific buildings, what’s the process?

- Individual landmark – do it all the time. Higher bar – evaluated more closely than just “contributing building” – looked at for intactness. Has to meet 1 of 6 categories – historic figure, significant event, notable architecture – outstanding representative of period of development.

Greta – could you talk more about non-profit L’Enfant Trust

- Would be happy to share info. Role – were about to lose 2 significant contributing structures – if you lose contributing structures, you may lose historic designation. Have several programs, “revolving trust fund” – purchased houses from people who could no longer take care of them; put their money into restoring and sold houses. Actually lost

money on transaction because they did high-quality work. Weren't in it to make money, want to save houses.

My house is currently painted brick house. If I remove old peeling paint, can I repaint or leave exposed?

- o Can do either. Do not review paint color, or can leave unpainted. Only permit – if you need scaffolding, need scaffolding for that (but would need permit either way). Can also paint if currently unpainted. But HRB will provide guidance on technique and colors if interested.

Aren't some design decisions subjective? How are differences in taste/aesthetic preference handled?

- o Each case is unique because every building/context is different. Makes job challenging. But we do have guidelines we follow, and a series of principles that we do apply. One person from staff would be assigned to Eckington, but not just on that person's shoulders. Whole review group meets and looks at all projects to ensure consistency.
- o Walt: Do you use application as framework moving forward – e.g., porches are important.
- o Yes – nomination for Eckington district would catalog significant architectural features, attributes on houses.

Briefly discuss how historic designation would impact solar panels, roof decks, pop-ups

- o Pop-ups – only allowed if not visible from the street.
- o Zoning: Have solar rights – if you have solar panels and someone wants to build taller next to it, must be reviewed.
- o Historic preservation: approve solar panels if not visible.
- o Rooftop decks: As long as not visible from street, can do rooftop deck.
- o Zoning: working on it.
- o Greta – air conditioners on top of houses – said no, put in back yard on ground.
- o Anything on top of the house – allowed if not visible from street

Homeowner grant program – 15 grants per year seems low. What can be done for low/fixed income residents who need to make improvements?

- o Kim: Have a certain fund of money that we can give out. Have no problem distributing that, but wish it could be more.
- o Greta – Anacostia one year got 15-20 grants. You need to advocate for the money, talk to councilmember.

Why can't windows, etc., be regulated via zoning?

- o Don't know that you want majority of buildings in city to go through somewhat subjective review process? Don't want DCRA to decide if they like your design or not. Zoning deals with mass, roofs, etc. But want to make sure you have a healthy house, not impact privacy, safety, but not into aesthetics.

Do you need an architect to draw up designs?

- For things like windows, doors – print out info from manufacturer website, want to make sure configuration and profile were the same – print out those spec sheets. Can email ahead of time to get ok, then come in w/ photo of existing, specs for propose, come in and get permit.
- Follow-up: Bloomingdale: Had replaced windows w/ transom windows – no other homes on street have those. If he replaced 1 window, would he have to have 1 window that matches rest of street but not his house? Would replace w/ windows that match his house.

Can a new historic district have pattern book like Anacostia? Does neighborhood provide input?

- Greta – it's collaborative. We pushed for getting guidelines – many historic districts don't.
- Kim – did one a few years ago w/ GWU – campus and some private properties. Wanted GWU Historic District guidelines.

Exactly which blocks would be included in historic district? Would school?

- Peter – boundaries are in flux because analysis not done. School could be individual landmark – very historic on its own. Many DC public schools have been renovated very beautifully and are state of the art even though they're landmarks – wouldn't mean school couldn't be modernized.
- To determine boundaries – look for common themes, building style. In Eckington, some things are strong candidates for boundaries – FL, RIA, North Cap, railroads – work with those as starting points and adjust.